

DUXBURY BAY

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Pier Issue is Vital to the Future of Duxbury Bay

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We are the Bay Preservation Committee, currently sponsoring two articles (29 & 30) to be voted on at Town Meeting. These articles relate to the overdevelopment of piers on our shore. We'd like to describe how we morphed from a small band of neighbors into a citizen advocacy group, and why we believe that this issue is vital to the future of the Bay.

It started at the Water Street Landing, as a group of neighbors discussed the fact that new owners of the abutting property planned to build a pier. We were disheartened by the news. Recently, a pier was erected just a few lots to the north. Okay, one new pier was tolerable. But now, looking both north and south, orange stakes poking up from the sands ominously hinted at future piers. Three piers within a few months – piers proliferating – each slicing into another stretch of open shoreline. Piers shrink the space in the Bay available for swimming, boating, fishing and clamming and affect safety. Piers destroy views. Piers are made of chemically treated wood, which the EPA has recently banned because it leaches poisons into the waters.

What about the rights of

property owners?

We are as much in favor of property rights as the next citizen. But the Bay is for all of us, and property owners and other citizens have rights in the tidelands. In the town Comprehensive Plan, two major goals are to "protect the water of our harbors and beaches" and "to provide and enhance recreational facilities for all residents." The pier owner gets the benefit of using his pier during the warm months, generally 3-4 hours a day, at high tide when the floats at the end of the piers are actually in the water and not resting on mud flats. Although the piers can protect grasses from being trampled, there are few other benefits to the rest of us. We decided the town needed some new pier policies. Maybe better design could result in smaller piers. Maybe owners could share piers within a neighborhood. Maybe town landings need special consideration. We need a forum and some time to study these issues to generate new ideas.

From grumbling to action.

We quickly realized that many other residents shared our concerns and wanted to join the effort. Other waterfront owners have been stopped by their neighbors from building piers. Some civic-minded owners

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even volunteered to withdraw their applications for the special permits needed to build piers. These past successes prompted us to turn our concerns into action. We became the Bay Preservation Committee.

Immersing ourselves in the town regulations, we learned that each pier had to be approved by various town boards that considered each permit on an individual basis. But none of the boards considered the cumulative effect of approving pier after pier. As a result, Eagles Nest Cove is clogged with piers. More than half of the waterfront owners have them, and others have applied. Who is in charge of looking at the impact of large numbers of piers on the Bay?

Developing a Bay management strategy

While there are many groups in town that are deeply concerned with protecting the Bay, there is no overall plan for its future. There is no single entity with the responsibility for comprehensive oversight of the Bay. While piers are not the only threat to the Bay, piers are an issue needing immediate attention. For the future, we need guidelines to mediate the many competing interests for use of the water. We need a management strategy. As the Bay Preservation Committee, we advocate the development of this overall plan.

Meanwhile, we are starting with the pressing issue of too many piers. In Article 29 we ask the "Town to establish a committee to study, develop and recommend guidelines, principles and practices for pier regulation." Article 30, a companion article, asks the Town to enact an immediate moratorium on any piers presently in the permitting process, as well as any new piers, for one year. The moratorium will allow time for the proposed study. The results of the study and recommendations for future regulation will be brought to the citizens for ratification at next year's Town Meeting.